

THE GULL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 100 NO. 5 WINTER 2016

MAKING BAY AREA BUILDINGS SAFER FOR BIRDS

BY ILANA DEBARE

Noreen Weeden stood before a conference room of two dozen architects and pointed to a slide of a Peregrine Falcon on a downtown San Francisco window ledge. "Over 300 million birds are killed in building collisions each year in the United States," she said quietly. "More birds are killed by building collisions than any single source other than cats."

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Surf Scoters, winter visitors to San Francisco Bay.

CHAMPIONING BIRD SAFETY CAN BE A REAL BLAST

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our San Francisco Bay is a site of great importance for migratory birds including waterfowl. In fact, large percentages of entire species' populations spend at least a portion of every year on the Bay. A major challenge for Golden Gate Audubon is figuring out how to keep these wild creatures safe in the heart of our bustling metropolis.

With energy developments like the wind facilities in the Altamont, we've battled continuously to ensure that "green energy" production will truly sustain (not destroy) our wildlife. The danger to birds was recog-

nized far too late by the first generation of wind farms, so the effort to convince industry to evolve responsibly has been uphill and taken many agonizingly long years.

Yet improving bird safety needn't be so arduous.

Recognizing that professional arborists and municipal tree care workers were amenable to learning how to avoid harming nesting species, we pioneered our Healthy Trees, Healthy Birds campaign last year. Earlier—as you can read in our cover story—we prevailed on the cities of both San Francisco and Oakland to adopt first-

in-the-nation bird-safe building ordinances.

Sometimes public agencies recognize how much sweeter success can be when they consult proactively with environmental stakeholders. That's what happened with the recent Bay Bridge pier implosion project, part of removal of the old bridge's columns.

Months beforehand, CalTrans realized that this high-profile project would affect the Bay and its abundant wildlife. They convened a council of experts including resource agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and California Department of Fish and Game) and important nonprofit ecological stakeholders: Golden Gate Audubon, Save the Bay, Point Blue Conservation Science, Sierra Club, and others. They disclosed plans for speedy removal of the old span's Pier E3: an ingenious six-second implosion that would precisely collapse the pier into itself, entombing debris down in its own hollow core.

CalTrans invited us to voice our concerns and propose mitigations for foreseeable impacts. We urged particular protection of rafting birds (including flocks of diving ducks, grebes, and cormorants) likely to be in that vicinity in November. We recommended a set of acoustic and visual hazing techniques to move birds well out of the blast zone. We also urged maximum reduction of noise transmission, especially through the water, so as not to deafen marine life.

CalTrans not only listened, they heeded our advice!

The pier implosion was a real blast—and went off without a hitch. It was a prime example of how public projects are improved when agencies take the time to proactively engage the conservation community.

NEWS BRIEFS

Master Birder Class

GGAS will co-sponsor its fourth annual Master Birder class with the California Academy of Sciences, starting in February 2016. This year-long class includes monthly classes at Cal Academy, field trips, research projects, and community service. Info at goldengateaudubon.org/education/classes.

Protecting Alameda's Plovers

GGAS persuaded the East Bay Regional Park District to install educational signage and symbolic fencing to protect Western Snowy Plovers that roost at busy Crown Beach in Alameda. The payoff? As many as 32 of these threatened birds have been documented on the beach this winter!

Do You Get Our Emails?

Subscribe to our free monthly e-Gull and Field Trip e-newsletters to get news about upcoming bird walks, birding festivals, family nature events, volunteer opportunities, and other happenings. If you don't currently get our e-newsletters, send your name and contact info to ggas@goldengateaudubon.org.

Birdathon 2016 Is Coming!

April is our annual Birdathon month, with extra-exciting field trips and behind-the-scenes tours. Check your mailbox and our website in February to learn this year's special destinations! Then ask friends to sponsor you...and help us make our biggest fundraiser of the year a success.



Lee Hong Chang

GLEN CANYON: BAY AREA HOTSPOT

BY DOMINIK MOSUR

LOCATION

70 Elk Street
San Francisco

Glen Canyon offers some of the last riparian habitat in San Francisco.

During the most significant drought in California in a millennium, a trickle of water continues to wind its way down Glen Canyon in south central San Francisco. These headwaters of Islais Creek—thought to be the largest creek in pre-settlement San Francisco—eventually empty into the Bay below Highway 280.

Riparian habitats—areas along rivers and other water courses—are scarce in San Francisco. Virtually all the creeks and streams once weaving their way down the hills and through the canyons on which the city was built have long been subjugated to human will through underground channelization.

With year-round water and high-quality habitat, Glen Canyon remains a prime spot to seek out locally-scarce riparian nesters and the gleaner flocks that also favor this location during migration and winter.

The steeper, upper section of the canyon where willows mix with scrub offers a unique plant community blend, where one can encounter locally rare resident Wrentit and Bewick's Wren. In sum, close to thirty spe-



Eddie Bartley

(Left) Glen Canyon Park; (above) Great Horned Owl and owlet in park, 2009.

cies of birds can be expected to at least attempt nesting in Glen Canyon each spring and summer, depending on the conditions.

In the past decade, under the management of San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department's Natural Areas Program, restoration efforts along the creek have improved the habitat, resulting in nesting success by Pacific-slope Flycatcher and probable nesting attempts by Swanson's Thrush and Bullock's Oriole. All three of these species are medium- to long-range migrants that spend their winters in the tropics.

For seekers of rarities, the canyon over the years has hosted unusual migrants like Red-eyed Vireo, Rock Wren, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Indigo Bunting, Summer Tanager, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, among others.

Additionally, the canyon is home to some of the longest continuous resident Great Horned Owls and coyotes in San Francisco. These subsist in part on the introduced Eurasian brown rats that abound in the City, but their diet is also bolstered by meadow voles, a key-stone rodent species that can be observed throughout the park.

Other locally rare plants and animals that may spark the interest of birdwatchers expanding their biological horizons include: Columbine and Seep Monkey Flower, which grow in restored areas near the boardwalk, Terrestrial Garter Snakes, Northern Alligator Lizards, Arboreal Salamanders, and one of the largest populations of Vivid Dancer damselflies within city limits.

Read a longer version of this article on goldengateaudubon.org/blog, where you can also find reviews of other local Birding Hotspots.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

GGAS'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS: VARIED BACKGROUNDS, COMMON PASSION

BY ILANA DEBARE

Field trip leaders. Birding instructors. Shoreline docents... Those are some of the best-known public faces of Golden Gate Audubon Society's many volunteers.

But there's another group of behind-the-scenes volunteers who are just as important—the Board of Directors.

What exactly does the board do? As at other nonprofits, the GGAS board's mission is primarily one of oversight. Board members don't run day-to-day operations. They set strategic priorities, approve the budget, and help raise the money that GGAS needs to accomplish its goals.

Many board members also volunteer in GGAS's programs. Board Vice President Linda Carloni, for instance, works with kids in the Eco-Education program, recruits corporate sponsors for Birdathon, and co-teaches a Waterbirds class for GGAS.

Why do they do it? Each board member has a unique story, but underlying them all is a passion for Bay Area wildlife and for GGAS.

Carloni, a retired attorney, joined the board to repay some of the knowledge and pleasure she'd gained from GGAS birding classes over the years. "GGAS is special because it protects the environment by connecting people better to nature, so they want to protect it," Carloni said. "That's different from a lot of environment groups."

Jack Dumbacher, chairman of mammalogy and ornithology at California Academy of Sciences, got involved because of GGAS's sterling reputation in the birding world. But, even as a professional ornithologist, he's learned things from his work on the board and as chair of GGAS's S.F. Conservation Committee. "I've learned so much on the board about politics, conservation, and birds," he said. "I've grown a lot from interacting with other board members."

During 2016, the biggest single issue facing the board will be planning for GGAS's upcoming centennial: The organization was founded in 1917 as the first Audubon chapter on the West Coast. (Stay tuned for more information on the centennial in upcoming *Gulls*!)

Other issues for 2016 include maintaining the organization's



Ilana DeBare

Some GGAS board members at a planning retreat in September 2015.

gradual financial recovery from the recession, and recruiting new board members to replace those with expiring terms.

Unlike some nonprofits, you don't have to be a big donor to be on the GGAS board, although all board members commit to supporting the organization at a level that is meaningful for them. GGAS looks for people with passion, a willingness to work hard, and a variety of skills. The board currently includes lawyers, scientists, businesspeople, naturalists, and wildlife photographers.

"The most important thing is someone who groks what the organization does, how to support it, and is complimentary to other members' strengths," said Board President Alan Harper. "You don't have to be the best birder in the world, or the most well-connected person, or the most strategic thinker...but it's nice to have one of each of those."

For a roster of current GGAS board members, please visit goldengateaudubon.org/board.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MLK Day Habitat Restoration Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline Monday, January 18

Honor Dr. King's legacy by restoring habitat for wildlife in the Oakland shoreline park that bears his name, 9 a.m. to noon. Or join one of our many other habitat restoration days each month on both sides of the Bay! Details at goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer.

Bird Count for Kids Lake Merritt, Oakland Sunday, February 14

Bring your kids for a morning of bird fun and exploration! No experience needed. We'll submit the findings of our young citizen-scientists to National Audubon's Great Backyard Bird Count, held this weekend. Details to come in our monthly e-newsletter, or email adecicco@goldengateaudubon.org.

Birding on the Bay and Delta With Dolphin Charters Various dates

Experience the birds of S.F. Bay and adjacent waterways on a GGAS boat trip with Dolphin Charters. Full-day Delta boat trip on February 13, or half-day trips up the Napa River (March 13) or Petaluma River (April 15). Advance registration required. See goldengateaudubon.org/fieldtrips.

BUILDINGS CONTINUED from page 1

Weeden, conservation project manager for Golden Gate Audubon Society, was speaking at a professional-development class for architects on bird-safe building design.

The training sessions—co-sponsored by GGAS and the American Bird Conservancy—are the latest initiative in a long-running campaign by Golden Gate Audubon to address the deadly hazard of bird-building collisions.

The root of the problem lies in birds' inability to detect clear glass, which has become increasingly popular as a building façade in urban areas.

Many birds see a glass wall as open air, especially if it is reflecting trees, sky, or water. Urban nighttime light intensifies the problem by attracting migratory birds—which often navigate by the stars—into tight downtown corridors where collisions are likely.

But there are a variety of ways to reduce these hazards, from technological fixes such as textured glass that is visible to birds, to behavioral fixes like dimming office building lights at night.

Golden Gate Audubon is drawing on all these approaches in one of the country's most comprehensive local campaigns against bird-building collisions.

GGAS started in 2009 with a Lights Out for Birds public education campaign, collaborating with City of San Francisco staff, PG&E, and commercial building owners



Bird-safe building guidelines can save the lives of songbirds like Townsend's Warblers.

Neil Berget



American Kestrel with San Francisco office buildings.

GGAS has started offering training in bird-safe building design to Bay Area architects.

and managers. The message? *Turn out lights or draw shades at night during spring and fall migration.*

From there, GGAS worked with San Francisco planners to pass Standards for Bird-Safe Buildings in 2011. These standards—which are mandatory for new construction in areas next to parks, water, or other open space—require design measures that will reduce collisions. GGAS collaborated with Oakland city planners to enact similar building guidelines there in 2012.

Volunteers with GGAS's conservation committees continually monitor new development proposals in San Francisco and the East Bay, submitting comments to improve bird safety. Recently, GGAS members met with architects for Uber to give input on its proposed new headquarters at Mission Bay.

"Uber's concept was transparency, and they initially wanted the building to be completely transparent," Weeden said. "Now they are looking at innovative ways to apply fritting [texture] to the glass, which would make it both safer for birds and more energy-efficient."

GGAS's newest initiative is training for architects. The hour-long seminar was developed by American Bird Conservancy, and is certified by the American Institute of Architects for continuing-education

credit. GGAS adapted the curriculum to reflect West Coast buildings, materials, and landscapes and now offers the training free to local architectural firms.

"The goal is for architects to recognize hazards to birds in the built environment, and apply the best practices to prevent building collisions," Weeden said. "Architects are creative problem solvers. We present the problem, show them some ways it's been addressed, and provide an opening for them to find other ideas that will work for their new buildings."

HOW YOU CAN HELP

During spring and fall migration, turn off lights or draw shades at night. Tell friends, co-workers, and building managers about our Lights Out for Birds campaign. This year's spring campaign starts on February 15: Info at goldengateaudubon.org/lightsout.

Know any architects? Let them know about our free bird-friendly design class! To schedule a class (minimum 20 people), please email nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org.

Tell your U.S. Senator and Congressperson to support H.R. 2280, which would make federal buildings less hazardous to birds. Find more info at www.audubonaction.org/bird-safe-buildings-fact-sheet.

SPEAKER SERIES



Brian L. Sullivan

How many heron species can you find in this photo?

BETTER BIRDING

BRIAN L. SULLIVAN

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, January 21
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7:00 p.m. program

Learn tips, tools, and techniques to become a better birder! In his new book *Better Birding*, Brian L. Sullivan reveals techniques used by expert birders to identify species in the field quickly and easily. He goes beyond traditional identification elements like plumage to create a context around each bird that includes habitat, behavior, and taxonomy—things that are integral to bird ID but often glossed over by typical field guides. This “wide-angle” approach to field birding simplifies identification with strategies tailored to different groupings of birds.

Brian L. Sullivan has conducted fieldwork on birds throughout North America for the past 25 years. He is currently project leader for eBird and photographic editor for *Birds of North America Online* at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He also served as photographic editor for the American Birding Association’s journal *North American Birds* from 2005-2013. He is co-author of books including *Better Birding* and the forthcoming *Princeton Guide to North American Birds*.

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

DON'T MISS OUR NEW START TIMES

Note new earlier start time for our speaker programs: 6:30 p.m. refreshments, 7 p.m. program!

PROTECTING SF BAY WATERBIRDS

KERRY WILCOX

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, February 18
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7:00 p.m. program

Thousands of migrating ducks, grebes, coots, and loons arrive in California each winter. While they seem plentiful, nearly one-third of waterbird populations are declining, including Surf Scoters and Lesser Scaups. Audubon California recently launched a Waterbird Program at its Richardson Bay center in Tiburon. Learn how Audubon is using Richardson Bay to protect waterbirds, and how it plans to scale up these conservation actions to S.F. Bay and the Pacific Flyway.

Kerry Wilcox is Waterbird Program Manager at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center in Tiburon. Previously he was a biologist with the Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes Station.



GREAT GRAY OWLS OF THE PACIFIC STATES

HARRY FULLER

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, March 17
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7:00 p.m. program

The tallest owl in North America, the Great Gray remains elusive, mysterious, and a highly-prized sighting among birders. Learn about this bird’s actual breeding range (which is different from the maps in field guides), its annual life cycle, and the challenges it faces with climate change.



Harry Fuller is co-author of the new book, *Great Gray Owl in California, Oregon and Washington*. A former Bay Area resident now living in Oregon, he is co-founder of the Ashland Mountain Bird Festival, featuring the area’s nesting Great Gray Owls. He leads an annual birding trip in Oregon for Golden Gate Audubon.

DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous gifts supporting our many conservation, education, and habitat restoration activities!

Donations from September 1 to November 30, 2015

GOLDEN EAGLE
(\$1,000 and above)

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PEREGRINE FALCON
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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

Report your unusual bird sightings: 415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

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Visit our online store at goldengateaudubon.org/store.

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JOIN GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON FOR 2016!

If you haven’t yet joined or renewed your Golden Gate Audubon Society membership for 2016, now is the time! Members enjoy discounts on birding classes, speaker events, pelagic trips, and merchandise, as well as subscriptions to The Gull and our e-newsletters.

Although GGAS is a chapter of National Audubon, we are an independent nonprofit that must raise all its own funds. We rely on member support to continue our vital conservation and environmental education work.

Don’t miss out! Support bird conservation in the Bay Area by renewing or joining today. Renew securely online at goldengateaudubon.org/join or call (510) 843-2222.

www.goldengateaudubon.org

 The Gull is printed with soy-based inks on chlorine-free paper, 30% postconsumer waste content.

3 Bay Area Hotspot: Glen Canyon Park

The headwaters of Islais Creek are one of the last riparian habitats left in San Francisco.

4 Inside the GGAS Board

The GGAS Board of Directors has a wide variety of backgrounds but a shared passion for wildlife and for Audubon.

6 Speaker Series

Brian Sullivan from eBird reveals Better Birding techniques in January, plus waterbirds and owls in February and March.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Miya Lucas

Cedar Waxwing.

CEDAR WAXWINGS

BY MIYA LUCAS

It's a winter day in the Bay Area and you're walking home from work, when you hear soft, high-pitched hissy whistles. You look up and notice a flock of birds perched in a tight-knit group—Cedar Waxwings, some of the Bay Area's most distinctive winter visitors.

Cedar Waxwings fly in large flocks and are considered nomads, wandering everywhere together. Even nesting, they remain in close

quarters with one another. Rarely do you ever see just one Cedar Waxwing!

Other than those high-pitched hissy calls, Cedar Waxwings do not sing. It's theorized they've evolved not needing to sing. As nomads, they don't need to defend a territory. The male attracts a mate with a hopping dance in which he passes a piece of fruit, berry, or insect back and forth with his desired female.

Cedar Waxwings mostly eat fleshy fruits and pick insects off of vegetation. However, they also catch meals on the wing via "hawking"—when a bird watches for flying insects from a branch, then flies out to catch them in mid-air.

When eating fruits or berries, they digest the entire fruit, unlike other fruit-eating birds that regurgitate the seeds. Their excretion of the seeds plays an important role in seed dispersal for many plants.

Up close, Cedar Waxwings resemble bandits with a black mask. Like the black smudge applied under the eyes by football players, this blackened area reduces the sun's glare.

It can be hard to tell males from females, but the males have more black on the chin extending to the throat, while females have a dull or brownish-black chin. Juveniles have a streaky breast with white chin and bold malar stripe. The tip of the tail is yellow and broader in adult males, and narrowest in immature females. Some individuals have an orange tail tip, which has been attributed to eating a non-native species of honeysuckle during molting.

Cedar Waxwings have a lifespan of about seven years. Fortunately, their population is not considered endangered, although climate change will likely affect their range. I hope you'll get a chance to see them before they leave in late spring to breed in Humboldt County, Del Norte County, and spots further north.